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HISTORY AND GLORY OF THE CONCERT-HALL OF THE PARIS CONSERVATORY

(1811-1911)

By HENRI DE CURZON

WHEN the State decided, about 12 years ago, to transfer the National School of Music and Elocution into a new locality more spacious, open, and convenient than heretofore, under the title of Conservatory, public opinion was suddenly brought face to face with an inevitable question.

What was to become of the Concert-Hall of the Conservatory? Should it ruthlessly follow the fate of the buildings doomed to speedy demolition, or should it be spared,—the sole survivor of this time-honored seat of study and of art? The matter was not going to be settled without dispute. In the eyes of the economists, appointed to investigate the case, it was only a question of some old and uninteresting buildings occupying a most valuable site in a very commercial district, and the recovery of which would mean a great profit. Little did it matter to them, that some of the buildings might arouse particular regrets, and that they were in a measure historical. It was, moreover, represented to them that the Hall in question, standing in a corner of the plot and detached on two sides at least, only occupied a minimum of this space, and the most profitless at that. They replied that the smallness of this hall together with its inconvenience with regard to space—its lack of comfort, and from a musical point of view, its incapacity for the execution of modern music, should all justify its being abandoned.

Happily they convinced no one. Those who defended the accused, that is to say, all the artists and music-lovers, had stated their case sufficiently well.

They did not think of denying these shortcomings. Although in accepting them for so long, they had become almost oblivious to them; and what were they, in comparison with the exceptional and priceless qualities which caused all defects to be forgotten?

“The Concert Hall of the Conservatory!” they cried, “Why, it would be as monstrous to move it in order to recover the site, as it would be to tear down a cathedral to widen a street!” A more sacred *Sanctuary* is not to be found in the musical world. Indeed, it is the only one; for the cult of Beauty has been observed there for one hundred years, without interruption, by the first artists of the world, who contended for the honor.—A question of sentiment accordingly?—Perhaps; and why not? The echo of so many master-pieces, wonderfully rendered, still resounds among these time-honored walls. Why consent to never evoking it again? However, the question of its utility must also be considered; for it is expedient that the essence of this beauty be safeguarded.

This rectangular hall, not very large in size, somewhat long, closed on all sides, and with a high ceiling, partly made of glass, may be compared to a gigantic violin—a fantastic Stradivarius, whose walls, whose smallest corners and windings, resound alike with a mellow harmony, light and sonorous, as proportional to the discreet intimacy of a trio or quartet of instruments as to the sumptuous amplitude of a symphony with choruses.

It is common knowledge that the acoustics of an auditorium is purely a matter of chance. When there is a question of building a new one, for the theatre, or for concerts, what wise calculations, what ingenious experiments are made! How rarely does the test give decisive satisfaction? In this case, nothing had been attempted, nothing calculated, and yet success was complete. Chance had accomplished what science could not have produced. People doubted at first, and the professionals did not fail to declare that the new hall was contrary to all the best rules. However, it was soon discovered that the rules were wrong, that the sensitiveness of this violin was unique, and became finer with the years. Later, no one dared to change it, and the most trivial necessary repairs were dreaded, in the fear of altering in the slightest degree, this exquisite delicacy of resonance, and unheard of miracle in acoustics. That is why we love this hallowed building, and why we cling to it. In this hall, music of such delicacy and taste may be enjoyed, as is found nowhere else. It is heard with more emotion, and penetrates the being with more rapture than in any other place. When it is interpreted by the incomparable orchestra which is organized by the *Société des Concerts*, the listener feels, from the first chords, as though bathed in a mysterious effluvium. He seems to have penetrated into the sanctuary at Delphi, and the oracle suddenly makes itself heard: “Deus . . . ecce Deus!”

Let us say in conclusion, that public opinion carried the day. The Conservatory is gone, and its buildings have given place to an enormous and unwieldy postal and telegraph station, the most utilitarian and unhandsome imaginable—but the Concert-Hall still remains, isolated, modest, and scarcely visible.

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It is now time to relate the story of the origin of this hall, and account for its existence in the institution known as the Conservatory of Music and Elocution, from which it is henceforward detached.

It was in 1762 that the representations of the Court, which depended on the distribution of the King's Household, and entitled, "Argenterie, Menus, Plaisirs et Affaires de la Chambre" (this was later abridged into the somewhat senseless term Menus-Plaisirs) acquired in the Poissonnière suburb, a large piece of land, where stood workshops of carpenters, decorators, painters, cabinet-makers, and costumiers, surrounding a hall, which was none other than that of the Opéra-Comique of the Foire St. Laurent, and which had been rebuilt.

The principal entrance to this place was from the Rue Bergère. The opposite side was bounded by a lane, which only later received the name of Rue Richer.

When, twenty years later, the question came up of facilitating the "recruiting" of the Opera, by founding a school of singing and elocution, the choice of its location naturally turned towards this piece of ground, where an approved theatre already stood. But only a small proportion of the land was considered, about one third, more or less; the part which bordered the Rue Bergère, which was only completed by extending it as far as the Rue du Faubourg Poissonnière. The remaining part of this sort of enclosed city still harbored the various trades utilized in the making and preserving of materials for the celebration of official holidays. Apparently the working people lived there happily and peacefully until the height of the Revolution, protected by their very necessity, and also by the numerous civil bureaus of politicians who found the place convenient and installed themselves there. It was, during this period, the strangest caravansary, and it retained its designation of "Magasins du Matériel des Fêtes" during the Empire and the Restauration. Not until towards 1850 did they give way to the street, the church (St. Eugène) and to the *maisons de rapport*, which stand there to-day.

The School of Singing of 1784 had, on its side, also continued to exist, in spite of the tumult; and, the results which it obtained under the direction of the composer Gossec, the idea of making the pupils perform whole acts of operas with orchestra and chorus, these things must be recorded in the history of musical instruction. However, this was not yet the actual Conservatory.

The Conservatory was the final outcome of the divers enterprises of Bordelais Bernard Sarrette, captain of the National Guard of Paris in 1789, who had conceived the idea of uniting the musicians and pupils of the old regiments of the French Guards, and to form them into a musical corps with a view to the musical needs of public holidays. Circumstances afterwards enabled him to convert this corps into the "Municipal School of Music" in 1792, and the "National Institute of Music" in 1793, but finally into the "National Conservatory of Music."

Its foundation dates from the third of August, 1795, but the installation of the premises proved such a laborious task, thanks to the ill-will of the inhabitants, that it was not until October, 1796, that the new school could officially open its classes. It is true that, after having at first flourished for a period, especially during the Empire, the popularity of the Conservatory began to decline, since the government of the Restoration reduced it to its primary object,—a school of singing, which was simply the lyrical alimentation of the Opera. However, the time of eclipse did not last long, from 1816-1830, and when the Conservatory had resumed its title and its object of existence, this was for a definite scope, which by degrees assumed a reputation of the highest value.

It is not for me to relate its development under the successive directorships of Sarrette, 1795-1815; Perne, 1816-1822; Cherubini, 1822-1842; Auber, 1842-1871; Ambroise Thomas, 1871-1896; Théodore Dubois, 1896-1905; and Gabriel Fauré. What interests us here, is the Concert-Hall.

This Concert-Hall owes its existence to an imperial decree, issued on the third of March, 1806. At this time, the school for its public performances had still only a small hall, situated on the first floor of the buildings in the Rue du Faubourg Poissonnière. We have seen it used, until the recent demolition of all the estate, for non-public examinations and elocution classes which need scenery.

The success it had met with, as soon as it was opened, and the co-operation of the public, interested in the work of the pupils and their concerts, had very soon caused it to be deemed

inadequate; and there had been no delay in selecting a new site, which would be truly worthy of the development of the school.

In this respect, no better place could be found than the one where but lately had stood the Hall of Menus-Plaisirs. Work in hand had already been turned in this direction; in 1801 building had been begun on a library, which the gift of a valuable stock of books and music had rendered immediately necessary,—between two courtyards and adjoining the houses on the Rue Bergère. It was decided to join the new Hall and its offices to this building so that each could profit by the other.

The Official reports of the time, show that the value attached to this library and this seat of artistic education, was without precedent:

This monument, unique in Europe and standing in the heart of the new metropolis of the world, should rightly bear the imprint of the grandeur of the Imperial Government which caused it to be erected, and to testify to the high patronage which the latter accords the fine arts... (and further, in a simpler style). By an excellent arrangement all the vestibules and staircases of the library will be utilized by the theatre, and will be common to these two principal parts of the establishment, destined, more than any other branch of the school, to attract large audiences.

This latter project had its drawbacks, and it was not pursued. We have therefore always seen the staircase and entrance of the library,—and of the Instrumental Museum, a new institution which was at first expected to form a part of the library,—entirely independent of those of the Hall.

The latter was not completed until 1811, under the direction of the architect Delannoy, and the inauguration was celebrated on July seventh of that year by a grand concert. The curiosity of the Parisians had been greatly roused for some time, and the effect was great. The result of the undertaking obtained scarcely anything beyond praises. If criticism gave free vent to its opinions, it was either on those points which seem secondary to us, such as the accomodation, or the locality, or on “principles” such as its planning from a musical point of view, then regarded as opposed to all the accepted rules,—a criticism which makes us, smile to-day.

I am going to quote some passages from the articles in the current newspapers. They will give a vivid idea of the public of the time and its point of view.

The most trustworthy account was published the following day by the “Journal de Paris,” a little daily, which has remained

so precious a document for all the literary and artistic activity of this period. Two days later the "Moniteur Universel" inserted it also in full, before speaking of the concert itself.

The arrangement of the locality placed the main building, destined to receive the library, between two courtyards. The architect has taken advantage of this to build a peristyle under which vehicles may enter under cover. This peristyle gives entrance into a vestibule, which is executed with the utmost simplicity, and only ornamented by the eight figures of the Muses, modelled on the antiques possessed by the Musée Napoléon.

A fine staircase with two balusters, leads to the auditorium, and to the gallery destined to receive the library; it is ornamented by a bas-relief of great size representing Minerva, distributing crowns to the different branches of study pursued at the Conservatory. The lateral walls are to be embellished by two grand tableaux; the door of the hall opens upon the landing of this great staircase, and leads to a *salon* which precedes the principal boxes. . .

Light columns support an arch, elegantly decorated, and pierced by a window which lights the hall and the stage. These columns stand on a base which comprise the boxes on the ground floor, and support the first and second tiers. A balcony reaches around the hall, below the first tier of boxes; it is breast-high, and ornamented with thyrses and festoons of vine branches, the former wearing alternately tragic or comic masks, and musical instruments.

The chief arch of the stage, supported by four columns, is decorated by five compartments in which are painted, in the centre, Apollo, Thalia, and Melpomene. Amphion, representing heroic music, and Pan symbolizing pastoral music, are placed in the lateral divisions.

The principal tone of the hangings is green; the background of all the architecture is gray linen, from which all the ornamentations stand out in dead white. The railings of the first and second tiers of boxes, are decorated with green hangings, embroidered and fringed with violet. The extension of the balcony rail, below the stage-boxes, is adorned with two bas-reliefs, one representing Orpheus, the other Eschylus, crowned by two genii.

The curtain, bearing in the centre the imperial coat of arms, separates the auditorium from the stage, which for concerts is decorated in the same way as the circular part which faces it.

Praise is due to Mr. Delannoy, not only for the excellent taste of the decoration of this hall, in which a sense of fitness must be recognized; but also for the good account to which he has turned the lack of space and the troublesome features which this place presented.

The comments of the reporters of the "Courrier de L'Europe" or the "Tablettes de Polymnie" were more *fantaisistes*,—an echo more or less of the discussions of spectators whose initial curiosity had been satisfied.

The vestibule receives the most commendation, although it appears somewhat low; but the lateral staircases, which are not mentioned

in the official account, are narrow to a degree. The balcony in front of the first tier of boxes, is too small. The only entrance to the lower floor, (to the orchestra and the pit) makes it impossible to pass out after having been seated. "As for the amphitheatre, which is placed entirely in a recess at the very top (*au comble*), it might be said without attempting a *calembour*, that the audience condemned to see nothing (doubtless because, in a concert one is only expected to listen) is there subject to the height (*au comble*) of discomfort owing to the heat and the mephitism. There is no circulation of fresh air, and consequently this gallery resembles a veritable oven, whose heat and discomfort make the pleasure of the music dearly bought."

This is not all; for what can be expected of a hall whose plan is a parallelogram? Is this not "the most unfavorable arrangement for a concert hall? From time immemorial, it has been recognized that circular halls succeed far better with regard to acoustics." It is also very surprising to see the orchestra seated at the back of the stage, when everywhere else it is placed between the performers and the audience. Truly people do not come here for the sake of seeing.

Finally, there is the question of illumination: and it is perhaps that which displeases more than anything else. In the first place, as the light comes from the centre of the hall, "the orchestra, for which it is of the utmost importance, has only reflected daylight, and is placed in the darkest spot." Moreover, "passing through a window made of rough glass, and being reflected on the white, green and violet furnishings, it renders the faces of the audience pale and yellowish, which is scarcely flattering to the ladies." They "complain exceedingly, of the disadvantage to which their beauty is subjected in the boxes. A bright day betrays to the eyes of the audience those little mysteries of the toilet, which enhance the freshness of their charms; a burning sun casts its beams directly upon them; the heat of its rays is disagreeable in more than one way, and the reflection of the colour of the boxes completes their distress by casting certain greenish and yellowish half-tints upon their faces, little calculated to beautify them."

Evidently the reporters amused themselves by displaying *style*.—The inauguration of the Concert Hall of the Conservatory in the middle of summer, before an audience arrayed in the fashion of the times, and for a *gala* event, naturally provoked such criticisms. It was decided, however, that, with all the lack of comfort of this new hall, the method of lighting by means of one window, far too small for the purpose, was perhaps—other examples can be quoted in Paris, notably the great Châtelet Theatre—precisely one of the causes of the marvellous acoustics. The concert itself was praised on all sides. It included symphonic and lyrical selections from Haydn, Mozart, Piccini and Gossec, and was performed by Nourrit the elder, Dérivis and Madame Branchu of the Opera.

After the concert, the audience probably walked in the gardens, for at that time the Conservatory was surrounded by large

grounds, and a ball had even been given there—a night celebration—in 1801, on the day when the foundation stone of the library had been laid. To mention the fact in passing, it is curious to note that this unfortunate library, the cause of so much labor, and so pompously advertised in advance, was in reality not opened until 1860. Too much had been excepted. The fall of the Empire had caused the subsequent retaking of the grounds by the Ministers of the King's Household, only leaving the School a very small part of its former possessions and assigning the new building, the Hall, and the neighbouring stores to the service of the Crown property.

In order to make use of the Concert-Hall, an official permit from the ministry was always necessary, and it was not until 1850 that the Conservatory regained the liberty of its disposal. However, the utilisation of the library caused ten more years of delay;—the transfer of the store-room, which carried with it the sale of the land, the opening of the two roads known respectively as “Rue du Conservatoire,” and “Rue de Sainte-Cécile,” and finally the construction of the façade of the building, whose ground floor was occupied until lately by the Museum, and the second story by the business offices of the library.

Fifteen years later, the Concert-Hall was completely re-decorated, at least, so far as the interior was concerned; and it is from this time (1865) that the Pompeian style dates,—a combination of old rose and green which is still maintained.

Since then, with the exception of the removal of a few seats, and some practical improvements, no further alterations have been made to this celebrated hall.

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Good fortune may provide a fine Concert-Hall, but it is the music performed there, which renders it both excellent and exceptional. Like a celebrated instrument, which never had any one but a great artist to master it, the Concert-Hall of the Conservatory owes its reputation entirely to the *Société des Concerts*. Fame is indissolubly attached to both, and one cannot be spoken of without the other.

Having been established for the use of the School of Singing and Elocution, doubtless the Society of Concerts belonged to this institution primarily. Its essential objects were the *concours* and performances of the pupils. Here, each year following the tradition, whose origin we have noted further back, the best

pupils in the instrumental and lyrical classes, perform either some time-honoured but seldom heard masterpiece, or a more modern composition, as an interesting proof of the excellence of their studies: Bach's cantatas, Händel's "Messiah," a motet by Rameau, a symphony by Beethoven, or his "Fidelio;" Mozart's "Marriage of Figaro" or his "Requiem;" Gluck's "Iphigenia in Aulis" or "Orpheus;" Haydn's "Creation"; Weber's "Oberon;" Mendelssohn's "Elijah;" or Rossini's "Moses," "Othello" or "Count Ory."

It was here also that the final annual competitions, (a perpetual source of keen interest to the public) took place, when (since illustrious) virtuosos and great artists first demonstrated their talents. Among the composers may be mentioned Hérold, Halévy, Berlioz, Thomas, Gounod, Massé, Bizet, Massenet; as instrumental virtuosos: Alkan, Franck, Saint-Saëns, Marmontel, Pasdeloup, Planté, Duvernoy, Diemer, Pugno, Alard, Tolbecque, Dancla, Lamoureux, Maurin, Sarasate, Colonne, Marsick, Tulou, Dorus, Altis, Taffanel; as singers: Ponchard, Bataille, Levasseur, Roger, Bussine, Faure, Capoul, Nicot, Maurel, Gailhard, Vergnet, Talazac, Villaret, also M^{mes} Falcon, Carvalho, Billbaut-Vauchelet, Richard, Rose Caron; as actors: Beauvallet, Ligier, Samson, Got, Delaunay, Thiron, Marais, Coquelin, Porel, Worms, Mounet-Sully, M^{me} Augustine, Madeleine Brohan, Favart, Sarah Bernhardt, Reichemberg, Croizette and Samary.

The chronicler could write an entertaining chapter,—but I shall resist the temptation: it would lead too far afield. Suffice the passing observation that from the pedagogic point of view the exceptional and sympathetic quality of our hall frequently proved a positive snare: it favored the voice altogether too much. Certain pupils, talented but superficial, triumphed here too easily. How much disappointment would have been spared them, if they had been compelled to let their budding talents shine in the cold surroundings of the present Conservatoire.

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The story of the Society of Concerts has frequently been related. It gave its first performance February 15th, 1828; but its instant superiority was only made possible by a long period of preparation.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the idea had been evolved with the object of emulation and benefit, to attract the

public by lyrical and orchestral performances, undertaken at first by the pupils of the School, and later by the professors. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, this plan was improved upon; the pupils united with their laureate comrades, and their masters, to establish a *Society of French Concerts* by subscription. The first performance was held on November 21st, 1801, and is described as follows in the flowery language of the time:

The happy thought which caused the founding of the *Society of French Concerts*, is crowned with the most brilliant success. The artists who compose the society, about sixty in number,—all pupils of the Conservatory of Music, and almost all honoured by the *palm* of talent in the competitions of this learned school; united at heart, and animated by the taste and the desire to perfect the sublime art of Amphion, have formed a society under the auspices of peace, to provide real enjoyment for true lovers of good music.

Laureate students and professors of the school—one sees how even then the actual method of recruiting the personal of the *Société des Concerts* prevailed essentially. However, the enterprise only lasted one year. Having returned to the precincts of their School in 1802, only actual pupils, directed by one of themselves, took part in the concerts. And yet this is the most interesting moment in the genesis of our celebrated Society; for it was not only in taking part, and soon almost exclusively conducting these performances, that Habeneck revealed his talent as a violinist of the highest degree, a conductor beyond compare, to whose lot it fell to be the real founder of the Society of Concerts; perhaps it was due also to his impulse that his fellow-students put on their programs from the very beginning together with symphonies by Haydn and Mozart, Beethoven's first symphonies, just written,—the one in C major, the "Eroica," and even that in C minor, in 1808, that is to say in all its freshness. And such was the perfection, the fire, and the musical beauty of the performances that the enthusiasm of the audience had its echo even in foreign lands. Some Germans declared they had never been present at such a remarkable concert, and already critics were making the following statements:

The more one hears the orchestra of the Conservatory, the more is the opinion, that it resembles no other, confirmed. Let us admit if we must admit it that we have heard elsewhere as much precision, purity and harmony; but where else can be found such warmth of young blood, such youthful verve?

These young and deserving workers in the temple of Euterpe are radiant with fervour; their love for their art is for them a religion, and we all know how alive, ardent and enthusiastic the devotion of youth is.

The success of the enterprise was in proportion to this praise; the public began to demand the repetition of whole symphonic movements as *encore* and the box-office receipts testified to its interest. This period lasted until 1814. Then the memory of it began to fade rapidly. But was it not worth while to revive it before narrating the début of the *Société des Concerts* proper which showed the same initiative, benefited by the same praise and enjoyed the same vogue? By the year 1828, however, the pupils had become masters, and the *exercices* became *concerts*. Habeneck, who was at that time the leader of the orchestra of the Opera house, had not for a moment lost sight of the idea of some day resuming these impassioned performances in this same Concert Hall of the Conservatory, where he and his comrades had made their first appearances. He knew,—and the *concerts spirituels* organized by him each year in the Opera house had also proved to him,—to what a degree of perfection acquired experience, years of joint study, and personal merit, could bring regular performances.

Under the auspices of and with the sanction of the director of the Conservatory, who from that time became the natural president, the society was soon established under conditions and proportions, which have not, so to speak, varied since that day.

It comprised, from the outset, as in our day, approximately 90 musicians (of whom 15 were first and 15 second violins; 10 altos; 12 violoncellos; 9 double basses); and 70 voices. A few candidates (“aspirants”) were added to the titular, and this term of probation became the great ambition of the laureate-students leaving the School, for the Society, henceforward independent, no longer admitted as member any student still at school. It was no less essentially connected with the Conservatory, however, by the obligations it assumed, on the one hand to perform the annual contributions to the “Prix de Rome,” and on the other, to reserve one of its performances for the benefit of the pension fund of the establishment. The rules, at this time, only provided for seven concerts a year, by subscription, and this order of things lasted for a long time. It was not until the year 1865, at the time of the repairs to the Hall, that it was decided to give two successive performances of the same program, thus bringing the number up to 14 (to-day, and already for some time past, the normal figure of 20 has been reached.) It must be mentioned at the same time that the subscribers have been divided into two groups; their number rendered this measure indispensable.

There is no need to repeat that the dilettante public immediately voted this orchestra "different from any other," and with much better reason than at the time of the pupils' concerts. People soon contended for the worst seats, and the very entrances. This singular privilege of standing in the entrances in the corridors of the upper galleries, in spite of their narrowness, was granted to sixteen titularies, and was not abolished until 1865. One must have known one of the individuals who profited by this arrangement, to get a clear idea of its "desirability."

Not a vacant seat, not an accessible corner anywhere without its subscriber; impossible to penetrate into the "sanctuary" without some fortunate invitation, or chance, which could not possibly be assured until the last moment, when a subscriber might relinquish his seat. In vain people entered their names years in advance as subscribers: the Society guaranteed the reversion of an *abonnement* to the family of the late holder. Accordingly, presence at these concerts soon came to be considered as a function of normal life. How many remember having gone to them as children, then as young people, then married, as fathers, grandfathers,—having seen their neighbours grow old, as themselves! Besides, even if the seat was not of the very best,—and verily, one could fare worse,—the music could be heard so well, everywhere!

That the audience had arrived at such a stage of exclusiveness, that, jealous of its traditions, it only wished to see them preserved, it could not be denied. Thus it happened later on, when other societies, more enterprising, more in quest of novelty and competition, more anxious to invent than preserve, offered "popular concerts" to a constantly increasing public,—that of the Conservatory retired all the more within itself, in its aristocratic dignity. Yet, had it not been an innovator in its time? Had it not distinguished with its favour numberless masterpieces, then as new and "audacious" as the most advanced of to-day? Had it not welcomed enthusiastically sundry other works, whose austere grandeur and difficulty had till then discouraged all performance?—such as Bach's Mass in B minor (1891) and even more so Beethoven's Mass in D (1888) whose effect was so prodigious, and whose success so celebrated. Moreover, this splendored auditorium may be said to have been above all, and from its first day, "the home of Beethoven." It should justly retain this title; I, on my part, say this in all sincerity: whoever has not heard the nine Muses of symphony in this very special ambient of sonority,

interpreted by this orchestra "which resembles no other," does not suspect what artistic joys they provide.

To impose Beethoven, from the very first and at so early a day, was an act of boldness; but we have already been able to prove the small amount of truth which may be attributed to the anecdotes so constantly repeated in connection with these débuts of the Society, in 1828. They try to make us believe that Habeneck alone had faith, in the midst of general incomprehension, and that he was forced to adopt ruses, in order that his musicians take the master of symphony seriously. Now, we have seen that these same musicians in their youth, had, with all their hearts, made Beethoven, the new and young, known to music-lovers. Later, they completed their task; but if any doubts could have grown up amongst them, it was because he had become more difficult than ever even for them.

Indeed, they enthused the most unexpected guests: does not Richard Wagner acknowledge that Beethoven was revealed to him at the Paris Conservatory?

Without entering into the details of the history of these 87 years of regular performances under the successive directorships of Habeneck, 1828-1848; Girard, 1849-1859; Tilmant, 1860-1863; Hainl, 1864-1872; Deldevez, 1872-1885; Garcin, 1885-1892; Taffanel, 1892-1901; Marty, 1901-1908; Messenger, 1908-1914; let us at least note some of the first performances,—truly sensational,—whose echoes still resound within our Hall, and which are like rays of glory.

To begin with *Beethoven*, his nine symphonies were all included in the first five years; the ninth, which was considered so "inaccessible," in 1831; the eighth (still unpublished) in 1832. At the same time, there figured on the programs, the majority of his overtures; also the concerto and the romances for the violin; the septet; fragments of masses; pages from "Fidelio," then various concertos for the piano; the "Ruins of Athens" (1847); and the whole of Egmont (1855).

Neither *Mozart* nor *Haydn* were forgotten; the latter was represented by his symphonies; parts of "The Creation" and "The Seasons" (both in entirety, later on); the former from 1828, by his three symphonies in E flat major, G minor and C major, his overtures, the "Ave Verum," and the "Requiem."

With its very first years are connected, *Cherubini* (overtures, masses, motets); *Händel* (fragments of oratorios,—later orchestral concertos); *Weber* (overtures and concertos); *Onslow* (symphonies); *Mehul*; *Gluck*; *Rossini*; *Meyerbeer* (overtures and fragments of

operas) and so forth. *Bach* appears in 1840 with a page from the "Passion of St. Matthew," in anticipation of numerous instrumental and vocal excerpts and various cantatas.

Mendelssohn begins in 1842 with his symphonies and overtures; then comes "St. Paul" (1846); "The Midsummer Night's Dream" (1851); "Athalie" (1867); "The Elijah" (1878); *Berlioz* appears from 1833, with his overture "Rob-Roy"; his "The Damnation of Faust" was heard in 1849, "Beatrice and Benedict" in 1863, "The Childhood of Christ" in 1864, "Romeo and Juliet" in 1873. *Pergolesi's* "Stabat mater" we notice in 1842 and "The Desert" and "Christopher Columbus" by *Félicien David* in 1849.

There is *Schumann* with his symphonies (from 1868 onwards), and his "Manfred" (1872); there is *Wagner* in 1866 with fragments of "Tannhäuser" and of "Lohengrin"; then *Gounod* with his "Requiem," "Gallia" (1871) "Mass of St. Cecilia" (1880); *César Franck* with "Ruth" (1872), "Beatitudes" (1882); *Reyer* with fragments of "Sigurd" (1876); *Saint-Saëns* (symphonies since 1872, orchestral pieces, "The Lyre and the Harp" 1880).

Since that time, with the progressive expansion of the new French school of symphony many remarkable masterpieces would still have to be mentioned, to show that the Concert-Society is attentive, not only to preserving the heritage of the masters, which is its duty, but also to keeping its audiences within the current of evolution, brought about by modern art and inspiration.

Still other echos might be evoked in this ideally harmonious auditorium: they are those of the illustrious interpreters, who, at all times, have been anxious for the honor of participating in these festivals of art.

I, for my part, would wish that their names be inscribed upon marble tablets like those of the masters and their works, together with the dates of the first performances which revealed them to the public. This would tend to emphasize the continuity of this artistic and exceptional education.

It was here that *Mendelssohn*, in 1832, played *Beethoven's* Concerto in G, and *Liszt* in 1835 that of *Weber* in E flat major; that *Adolphe Nourrit* revealed to *France Schubert's* "Erlkönig," and *Chopin* some of his most penetrating pianoforte compositions. Among the pianists, there are, *François Planté* (from 1861); *Theodore Ritter*; *M^{me} Clara Schumann* (in 1862); *Saint-Saëns*, *Rubinstein*; *Paderewski*; among the violinists, *Baillot*; *Sauzay*; *Alard*; *Sivori*; *Vieuxtemps*; *Sarasate* (from 1861), *Joachim*; the

flutists: Tulou, Dorus, Taffanel; the 'cellists, Servais, Franchomme; and finally the finest voices ever heard in France: Adolphe Nourrit, Levasseur, Duprez, Roger, Faure, Achard, Lasalle, Talazac, M^{mes} Falcon, Dorus, Damoreau-Cinti, Pauline Viardot-Garcia, Carvalho, Nilsson, Cruvelli, Krauss and Isaac,—to mention here only a few of those who are no longer living.

It is not superfluous to call attention to the fact that the greatest virtuosos, when they give their co-operation to this Society of masters, simply share the lot of the artists who compose the society. Such an exhibition of artistic fellowship is met with only here. The invited artist immediately feels that he is among his peers; and in fact, no approbation is more precious to him than the applause which the latter accord him from their seats, even during the performance.

It is now necessary to draw to a close; I have said enough, I think, to show why we are so cordially attached to our old Concert-Hall of the Conservatory,—why we wish to preserve it,—why we are proud of it, and finally in what particulars the impressions gained there are both unique and incomparable; and in what a halo of glory it appears to our eyes, as though transfigured, when we recall its radiant memories.

(Translated by Christine Groncke)